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ABSTRACT

The six issues examined in this discussion guide on the conference theme, Library and Information Services for Effectively Governing Society, are introduced by brief discussions providing background on libraries and governing society, and the roles of the library in enhancing the government of society in the future. The six issues are concerned with (1) effective distribution of information for governing society, (2) sharing of the government's legislative information system developed by the Congressional Research Service, (3) new and expanded library services, (4) freedom of information, (5) preservation of information sources necessary for governing society, and (6) a national information policy. (SW)

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Library and Information Services For Effectively Governing Society

A Discussion Guide

by

Susan Crooks

Prepared for the White House Conference on
Library and Information Services

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PREFACE

This discussion guide is intended as an informative and provocative summary of some of the many issues present in this theme. The guide was not planned to be exhaustive but to raise questions and stimulate discussion.

The guide has been prepared by an individual whose knowledge of the subject area is respected by colleagues and members of the community. In writing the guide, the author drew on the issues and resolutions raised in pre-Conference activities, documented in the many pre-Conference publications issued by the White House Conference staff. The author also drew on her own experience and background. The views and opinions expressed in the guide do not necessarily reflect the official position or policy of either the White House Conference staff or the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS).

The purpose of the guide is not to dictate the issues to be discussed but rather to provide some general background and to crystallize some of the major questions delegates may wish to address at the Conference. Final responsibility for deciding what issues are to be discussed and what resolutions are to be passed rests with you, the delegate.

Marilyn K. Gell
Director
White House Conference
on Library and Information
Services
October 1979

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ABSTRACT

Libraries, government and the private sector all have a role in providing the information needed for governing society. Many issues arise surrounding the roles of each:

1. How can information developed by the Federal Government be more effectively distributed to the public?

2. What new services might libraries offer to assist citizens, elected representatives and public officials in fulfilling their various roles?

3. What is the tradeoff between the citizen's right to access all Government-produced information and the need to protect the privacy of the individual?

4. How can documents important to our society be preserved for future generations?

5. Should the information developed by the Congressional Research Service for use by members of Congress be made available to the public?

6. Can a mechanism be established to provide for continuing discussion and debate on national information policy directions?

EXTRACTO EN ESPANOL

Servicios the Biblioteca E Informacion Para
Poder Gobernar Con Mas Eficacia

Los innumerables problemas de naturaleza diversa que nacen a raiz del cambio constante en las estructuras de nuestra sociedad moderna, han llegado a evocar un sentimiento de duda en la ciudadania en general acerca de la abilidad del gobierno a enfrentar y resolver eficazmente los problemas politicos, economicos y sociales de la actualidad.

Si fuese posible formar una fuente de informacion y facilitar la obtencion de la misma, esto podria aliviar en gran parte las dificultades que encuentran las agencias gubernamentales en la ejecucion de sus obligaciones. Aun mas, si dichas fuentes de informacion son puestas a la disposicion publica, quizas la ciudadania estaria motivada a una participacion activa en el funcionamiento del sistema democratico. Consecuentemente, serian las bibliotecas, el gobierno y la industria privada los llamados a suplir la informacion necesaria para una democracia eficaz. El papel que cada uno deberia desempenar traen a coleccion las siguientes preguntas:

1. Como puede ser distribuida eficazmente la informacion proveniente del gobierno, asi como informacion en recursos naturales, statisticas de censos y datos economicos? Cual es el deber del gobierno y cual el de la industria en proveer esta informacion? Cual es la parte que deben desempenar las bibliotecas?

2. Deberia el gobierno encargarse en producir informacion necesaria con cada cambio de la politica nacional? Cual es la responsabilidad del sector privado y cual la del gobierno a este respecto?

3. Que nuevos servicios de informacion pueden ofrecer las bibliotecas para suplir las necesidades de los ciudadanos y representantes elegidos por ellos? Por ejemplo, se deberia crear centros de informacion concernientes a un tema particular? Informar al publico acerca de actividades a llevarse al cabo? Analizar y evaluar informacion de origin diverso para el uso general?

4. Que limite se debe establecer entre el derecho de cualquier individuo para usar la informacion originada por el gobierno y el derecho innato a la privacidad que debe disfrutar cada ciudadano?

5. Como se pueden conservar documentos importantes para el uso de generaciones futuras?

6. Deberia ser ofrecida al publico la informacion que se publica bajo el auspicio del Congreso Nacional por el "congressional research service"?

7. Se puede establecer un medio para discutir la direccion que deberia tomar esta politica de informacion? Deberia el publico tomar parte en estas discusiones?

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES
FOR EFFECTIVELY GOVE[illegible]ING SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

The stakes are high in ensuring that information about governing society is accessible to all citizens. For today, more than ever before, information is a crucial resource in a democratic society. Where there is information, decisionmaking and the locus of power are present too, whether we are concerned with the exact nature of technical problems or their solutions, or the beliefs and behavior of individuals, or the time, location, and subject of meetings where issues will be discussed.

Because information is a critical source of power in directing democracy and because technological events of the past twenty years have altered previous patterns of acquiring information, how information is distributed over the next several decades will be an important determinant of our future. Those citizens with money, position, or substantial education have advantages in understanding how the complex issues of modern life can influence them and they can begin to influence Government policy. Can we broaden the base of that power by ensuring the distribution of information relevant to making the decisions of the future to all sectors of society?

Libraries and Governing Society: Background

An informed citizenry, which participates actively in the processes of government, and informed elected representatives and public servants, who focus debate and decide public issues, are critical for democracy to survive as we know it. The right information can help citizens and public officials anticipate, keep abreast of, and understand issues confronting our society -- issues which may challenge our basic ways of living and thinking. Library supporters have long held that libraries can--and should--enhance the governing of society through providing elected officials and citizens information that will enable them to be effective in voting, disputing issues, making, amending, implementing, and enforcing the law. This belief and its operational implications have shaped the delivery of library services in public and Federal libraries--and to a lesser extent in academic and school libraries -- over the past 100 years of library development in the United States.

The goal of libraries' facilitating the governing of society through providing information has been implemented as part of a set of widely held beliefs and expectations about libraries' role. In particular, these include:

1. The belief that the library role in serving the public as citizens and representatives runs parallel to all its other roles. The library should link citizens to communication and decision processes by answering questions, should inform citizens of upcoming meetings, and help them develop personal skills in order to engage more effectively in the governing process. The library should also provide information in raw and analyzed forms and in great variety to enable public servants both to understand and act sensitively on issues and the needs and desires of their constitutents. At the same time, the library should also perform a wide range of roles related to the entertainment and self-education of children and adults. It should help

preserve the culture, and it should respond to the special needs of the elderly, the incarcerated and the handicapped.

2. The belief that the library should facilitate participation in government in the same spirit as it has meaningfully performed its various other roles in the past several decades. We still look to the library to have the personal relationship to our lives that it may have had when we were children and the librarians knew our names and helped us find what we were looking for. This relationship probably derived in its turn from the fact that in earlier decades the librarian was an important figure in the town, and the library was a place where many people stayed in touch with the world. While much in the picture has changed, we still have the idea that people go to the library to be helped by other people to find what they need.

3. The library should facilitate participation through maintaining a strictly neutral position--providing information on all sides of all issues.

4. As a corollary to number 3, the library should make available essentially all information. This has been taken to mean everything produced by Government agencies and departments as well as the traditional and new offerings of organizations of all types--publishers, universities, all sorts of professional societies, trade associations, citizens' groups, and corporations.

5. The library should perform these services for everyone because it represents a free resource for all. "All" extends from members of the Congress and the Supreme Court and Executive Branch, through State, county, and municipal government, to citizens from all walks of life. Very specifically involved are the large numbers of citizens who lack many resources to provide them a basis for participation. Their access to information should help to compensate for the absence of a business or government position and provide personal contacts and formal information sources to make them effective spokesmen for their viewpoint in the economic and political life of the country.

The Issue: Libraries' Role in Enhancing the Governing of Society in the World -- 1979-1990

A few decades ago the beliefs outlined above were relatively compatible and easily implemented. In the past the roles of libraries, the private sector, and the Government have been relatively well worked out in disseminating the information citizens and their representatives need. But changing technology is causing serious discontinuities. The "worst case" description of the situation ten to fifteen years in the future would have two classes of information users, with one far less enfranchised in governing society because of the limited nature of its information resources--unless the Government adopts and implements a policy of basic rights to information.

Furthermore, Government, private sector, and libraries sometimes can do nothing to fill unmet needs. The responsibility for identifying unmet information needs has no clear focus. This is in keeping with the principles of diversity we have valued for two hundred years. Yet in itself this is no answer. Old policy approaches to information rights and needs may no longer be applicable. Why is this so?

Finally, we face remarkable opportunities as a result of advances in information handling made possible by communications systems; yet the new capabilities have altered radically the impact of many practices--for entrusting Government with information, for sharing intellectual property--which served us well for a long time. We do not yet know all the implications of policy decisions that have to do with information in all its many guises. Yet we are aware that we are making decisions today--about telecommunications, rights to radio airspace, the kind of structure to be used to deliver journal articles to libraries, technologies applied in libraries to save money--which may affect our ability to deliver information cost-effectively in the future.

Most librarians view these problems as having to be solved in the context of the beliefs about libraries outlined above. Yet, in a time of rising costs and diminishing shares for most human services, these values would have libraries play a meaningful role in every program area in which they are now involved--including improving our knowledge and understanding for participating in Government. What is more, these values would have libraries worrying equally about facilitating the participation of all citizens, whatever their degree of interest. These values would wish library services to be performed as nearly as possible for free. If all of this is no longer possible, what steps will enable us to preserve as much of the intent as possible? And what choices must be made?

Issue #1: How best can we distribute information needed for governing society?

During what is known as an information explosion, we have a hard time finding answers about how best to govern society. The average citizen, though he is bombarded by the electronic media and has available unprecedented library resources, is nevertheless confused about how best his Government should proceed on matters as diverse as energy, the environment, or the economy. It would be easy to say that this is a paradox. Yet viewing the situation as paradoxical dangerously oversimplifies an issue that we must face squarely if we are to enable citizens to understand important issues.

Despite the fact that Government and private industry produce a staggering amount of research, most of that material is not easily applied when the problems we face cut across all the old boundaries of subjects, professional fields, and political jurisdictions. We have such a rich network of sources of information, yet we still search for meaningful answers. Why?

We must ask similar questions from the point of view of Government and industry, which have tremendous information needs. Is information being efficiently transferred from one sector of the economy to another? What can we do when we must serve more complex information needs from a set of institutions whose roles were established decades ago?

Four points must be kept in mind as we examine the scope of the national information structure and the role libraries play in it.

First, the subject matter we must deal with in governing society today is broader and more complex than it used to be. Problems of pollution, occupational safety and health, and energy typify what citizens and their representatives must work with today--answers involve information from science and technology, the law, economics, demography, and medicine.

Second, there has been a corresponding increase in the ways information is distributed. No longer are libraries the sole distributors; today they are often not the primary source either for electronic databases or for answers to complex problem areas like energy.

Third, despite the many technical and specific questions being asked by Government and industry, the need for pure research has not diminished. Libraries will continue to play an important role for students and researchers who study pure science or the theoretical social sciences.

Fourth, as we prepare to make vast new information sources available to the public, we must endeavor not to create a class of "haves" and "have-nots." To some extent this problem is inevitable: those who can afford it will have access to superior information, but it may become the responsibility of the public libraries to ensure that information resources are made available fairly to all Americans.

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS THE LARGEST INFORMATION PRODUCING ENTITY IN THE WORLD.

The U.S. Government is by far the Nation's--and the world's--largest publisher. Each year the Superintendent of Documents prints millions upon millions of pages, and this excludes machine-readable data, microfiche, and the myriad reports and documents not made available for public use.

However, much of that information is not widely useful to the average citizen. Much of it is technical and written for a very narrow audience. After all, much Government-produced information is produced to facilitate the operations of Government. And it is unlikely that the same information will apply equally well to citizens' needs to grapple with the same issues--unless it is repackaged specifically for this purpose.

Communicating directly to citizens is not the primary purpose of many Government information activities. Yet Government agencies do make some special efforts to include the general public in their information-distribution plans. Agencies disseminate useful information--on weather, on population statistics, on crops, on health and nutrition. And they set up public information programs when they are trying to gain legislative support for new projects or trying to win public compliance with new initiatives.

GOVERNMENT INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION

At the core of the Federal Government's activities to disseminate information are the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) and the Federal Depository Library Program. These programs allow Federal agencies

to transmit their information to organizations, which then distribute it to the public. The depository libraries receive copies of every document received and printed by the Superintendent of Documents. The fact that these depositories are scattered throughout the country means that their materials are more easily available to most citizens.

While the depository libraries are used by members of the public and students, researchers and business users probably draw more heavily on the Government's other principal dissemination program, the National Technical Information Service. NTIS receives copies of technical reports produced by all Government agencies, departments, and their contractors and makes them available for a fee that enables NTIS to recover its costs. NTIS, like the Government Printing Office, has several programs for informing the public about the material it has to offer. These include not only a series of newsletters describing recent reports in various subject fields, but also a computerized database that allows users of automated search services to determine whether the Government has produced reports on a particular subject of interest.

The Government also maintains specific dissemination programs for large quantities of material important to workers in specific disciplines and professions. A notable example is the National Library of Medicine, which is chartered to serve unmet needs of doctors throughout the country. It has developed a very powerful information system that distributes to doctors both Government and non-Government-produced medical information.

THE FUTURE OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION

Much Federal activity in producing and disseminating information in the past has involved material oriented to research and development in industry and universities. Until quite recently almost none of the Federal agencies had the charter to serve information needs of the Nation at large. This is particularly true of information related to such new national challenges as economic stability, resource shortages, the safety of food and drugs, and alternative fuel technologies. There is thus the need for greater effort to create information of cross-disciplinary meaning that might help citizens discover solutions to today's complex legal and social problems.

Can the Nation's libraries play a valuable role here--by bridging the gap between the public's needs and the answers imbedded in the information the Government produces for itself? How should the private sector help?

LIBRARIES AS DISSEMINATORS OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION: THE CONCEPT OF ADDED VALUE

In industry, the term "added value" is used to describe the difference between a piece of raw material before it has entered the assembly line and the finished good which comes out at the other end. Machining a part to put into an automobile is an example. The idea is a powerful one. It has not been used to describe what happens in libraries, although most people who use libraries would find it meaningful.

Consider the difference between your objectives when going to a bookstore and a library. At the library the book has probably been selected to fill a collection on a particular subject, perhaps one that is important in that city or town. It is listed in the card catalog--probably under several headings in an effort to make it easier to find. It may have been pointed out by a librarian whose knowledge you count on. This source may then have been supplemented by the librarian's suggestions of additional resources--ranging from books to be borrowed from other libraries to films or magazine articles.

In a library, all these steps are the simplest modern version of added value, value added in the same sense that finishing a piece of raw metal makes it suitable for a useful purpose.

The added value that libraries provide is one of their greatest assets. In years past, an individual visited a library to fill a need. He received far more than what he would have gotten had he merely purchased a magazine or visited a book store. Libraries not only allowed interaction with another person, but they put the user in touch with someone who could customize the library's resources to his needs. This made the information more valuable, easier to use, and more efficient than other impersonal alternatives.

The idea of added value is especially important because there are so few simple answers and uncomplicated sources today. Understanding issues of importance to the

governing process almost necessarily involves subjects and material that are so complex that real time and effort are required to match a library user to the set of answers he needs in the form he can best use them.

Because such analysis is required, today it is much harder to add value. Issues are more complex, and frequently legal or technical knowledge is needed to provide precise assistance. Therefore, we face a critical question: Can and should libraries continue performing their role of adding value? Given present levels of funding, it is often impossible for librarians to spend the time needed to do so anymore. Yet if libraries no longer serve this role, where will our citizens obtain the help they need to assess key issues?

LIBRARIES AS INTERPRETERS OF INFORMATION

In addition to responding to particular user questions, the library can play the role of "information watchdog," bringing to the public the information that it needs but may not yet have asked for. This is not unlike the "watchdog" function of a Government agency.

A library can serve this function in a variety of situations. In a great many cases when something first becomes a matter of public concern, its implications are not clear. This is likely to mean either that the public is unaware that it will be affected by something at all or that ramifications of a problem or event are not well understood. How and to what extent should a library assist citizens or their representatives to become aware of additional information in such a situation?

THE EXAMPLE OF SPECIAL LIBRARIES

A partial answer can be found in the case of special libraries. In large companies, the library often provides management with a current awareness service, in which the librarian regularly scans magazines for articles on subjects important to the company's future, its competitors, etc. If the library is good and has its users' confidence, the most valuable part of the service lies in the fact that there will be unanticipated connections among subjects of interest—subjects that the librarian is in an especially good position to find. With skills in identifying what the user wants, in quickly reviewing such materials, and in being alert to where to look for things, he or she can be adept at finding information of which the user was not yet aware.

Three questions must be raised in considering whether there should be increased emphasis on this kind of service from libraries. First, in what important ways does it represent a departure from present practice? Second, is this the proper function of libraries? Third, what are practical ways to implement it?

SHOULD LIBRARIES BECOME INFORMATION INTERPRETERS?

At present there is little expectation--on the part of either the librarian's colleagues or public officials--of this kind of service. It must be asked: Would librarians receive support from their own management for giving such service? And would they be congratulated for their responsiveness or criticized for taking an implicit position on a subject? Most basically, would this jeopardize or improve libraries' chances for improved support?

How could libraries move in this direction? The answer is not easy because almost any active effort to link citizens or public officials with information will seem more political than librarians have ever been before. Within limits, doctors and lawyers avoid partisanship in the exercise of their profession. They take an active role with respect to the tools of their trade--legal precedent and medical science--but not with respect to the goodness or badness of the situations within which their clients find themselves.

Can librarians, as stewards of information, also take an active role without taking a position on whether or not the information--or their patrons--are right or wrong?

Finally, do the news media adequately interpret events, or does the value-adding capability of the library create a unique information service? Before creating a new library function, we must ask whether the function of information watchdog is not already being provided by other information industries.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATING VALUE ADDED SERVICES

Libraries must gain experience in identifying community information needs that are not now met but that libraries might fulfill. Pilot projects, requiring special funding, would have to be created to allow libraries to work with existing citizens' groups on public awareness programs.

Consider the kinds of partnerships that might be possible if Federal departments and libraries joined forces. There are many ways libraries could do this. An interesting special example would concern distribution of information during fuel shortages. For example, libraries could serve as emergency information centers to answer citizens' questions about local fuel availability. With a terminal attached to a remote resource collecting information for the State, a local library could either make queries or receive regular updates on gas station hours. Citizens could obtain this information by calling the library rather than driving from place to place to find an open station as has been done in earlier crises.

PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE IN DISSEMINATING GOVERNMENT-PRODUCED INFORMATION

Over the past 20 years there has been for the most part an extraordinarily productive, yet largely unplanned, complementary relationship between the information dissemination efforts of the Government and the private sector. The Government can be said to have prepared the way by funding very significant development of information retrieval capabilities in the 1960's. Private sector associations and publishers then further developed and applied these capabilities, first to basic subjects like pollution and energy--in what appears in retrospect to have been an appropriate division of labor.

At times, however, the Government and private sectors have wanted to develop a product at the same time. Here, the basis for the recurrent arguments about their respective roles becomes clear. The private sector must pass on to customers all or nearly all the costs for product development. The Government can simply absorb research and development costs and offer services at lower prices. As a result, it is said that the situation creates unfair competition for private sector publishers. On the other hand, more citizens have access to information services that are low-priced or free. Therefore, it is also argued that the private sector is not the best agent to distribute Government-produced information that needs to go to the widest possible audience.

In fact, while there have been and still are battles over where the Government is performing functions that the private sector would otherwise handle, dialog between Government agencies and private sector publishers is beginning to develop. To some extent the possibility of

coexistence is based on the fact that the Government and private sector may have different roles in disseminating Government-produced information.

The Government can play an important role in establishing information services where none exist. Some participants on both sides of this dialog argue for Government involvement; their reasons include:

1. Government can build an information infrastructure, e.g., by breaking new ground to develop retrieval software. In many cases very powerful systems and databases now in existence--in agriculture, medicine, applied astronautics, and aeronautics--would probably not have been developed without Government involvement.

2. Government can collect data, particularly when it is in a privileged position to do so, as in the case of high technology applications in building spacecraft or collecting census data.

3. Government can combine the two functions mentioned above to develop a service for distributing information to users both in Government and the public. In this instance, many believe that this service ought to be turned over to the private sector for long-term operation.

On the other hand, one of the most exciting developments in information retrieval capability occurred in the private sector; it developed software capable of searching the full text of legal material. However, we rely on both the Government and private sector for heavy investments in developing new technology.

THE SPECIAL STRENGTHS OF PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVES TO DISTRIBUTE GOVERNMENT-PRODUCED INFORMATION

In most cases, market forces clearly demonstrate whether products and services are in sufficient demand to warrant the expenditure of development money. Typically, there is a profit on popular products and a loss on unpopular ones. This is generally true of developing information products and services, although more risk is involved. It is often difficult to tell whether the public knows it has--and will pay to satisfy--an information need. This problem afflicts Government and private sectors alike in developing programs to distribute information to citizens.

If a private sector publisher expects a prospective information service to be popular among users, he has an incentive to undertake development effort. This can result in production of information packages and services that are carefully designed to suit users' needs and abilities to use information. On the other hand, the Government need not apply the "market test." Government services may be less effective in reaching their target audience because they may lack the motivation and expertise to package the information.

A SYSTEM IN WHICH BOTH SECTORS PLAY VITAL ROLES

Yet the profit motive and free market mechanism is not always an incentive to develop needed services. The private sector will not have the incentive to make materials available if subjects are of little general interest. This is especially true if there is low demand and it would be necessary to invest heavily in analysis and repackaging to render Government research usable from the citizen's perspective.

Finally, it is simply not the job of the private sector to create and maintain a record of all of society's thought and actions. A great many private sector publishers—profit and nonprofit—are as committed to their subject fields as libraries are to collections built up over many years. These publishers have edited and distributed high quality, highly technical books and journals for many years. They would not cease publishing in a field to which they are committed without much consideration. Yet at the same time, the private sector cannot be expected to serve as a permanent means of disseminating information for which there is very little demand.

Public and private sector information providers together constitute a system. Effective distribution requires performance of roles that the Government, private sector, and libraries can uniquely perform.

COPING WITH THE FUTURE: THE LIBRARY AS INFORMATION DISSEMINATOR IN AN INCREASINGLY TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The public library has undergone rapid change in recent years. As new methods of information distribution are created, the library will have to adapt to them or suffer the consequences of being left behind. This does not mean

that libraries will ever die; they are an accepted and important institution of society. But how libraries adapt will determine whether they are to be living centers of information or only repositories of old books.

In the next decade, electronic publishing will emerge as an important information tool. First, Government and industry will feel its effects as the formerly separate disciplines of intellectual production, physical production, and product dissemination merge. In the next few years, almost all Government information of any value will be available electronically. While this obviates a number of traditional library functions, far more opportunities will be created than will be lost if libraries position themselves now as custodians and sources of electronic information.

New habits developed to use electronic information by the working community will be extended to the home environment and to new media. Our reliance on the traditional materials that libraries house will diminish. Libraries that meet the challenge of the new information technology will thrive; others will be left behind.

Perhaps the most important reason for public libraries to be major providers of electronic information has nothing to do with the libraries themselves. Private sector information brokers and the libraries of large corporations are offering services that are strongly automated. They are providing many of their services for a fee. Most users have some organizational basis for paying for the services; they are businessmen, Government officials, etc.

If public libraries do not offer similar services, many citizens will have no access to the future dominant information sources of America; many will not be able to afford the private services or won't have the proper affiliation to gain access.

What is likely to happen? The spectre is that there will come to be two classes of information users--"haves" and "have-nots." On the one hand, there will be people who can access computerized and printed information (issues, statistics, demography, legal basis data, etc.). On the other, there will be people who get their information from sources with a form that makes manipulation difficult--printed books, magazines, newspapers, and broadcasting media.

Yet these sources are already completely packaged. Users cannot really form their own conclusions because they cannot take the contents of the information source apart, test its pieces, and recombine them. This is possible from the combined quantitative and qualitative automated reference services available from information brokers and timesharing services--or with the assistance of a librarian who would do the testing on the basis of his or her patron's question. But these services are provided almost nowhere without a fee.

The ability for all to share in knowledge has been a traditional function of the library. As society seeks information that is becoming more specialized, the Nation's libraries owe people the right to gain access to that new information. Libraries have historically played a crucial role in free societies. Today this responsibility is as great as ever.

A RIGHT TO INFORMATION?

What will happen if some of the voting public are information "have-nots?" The country will suffer doubly--citizens could not contribute fully to the decisionmaking process. This may also mean that a considerable portion of our people will be living, voting, and responding to a relatively narrow part of the complex picture of modern life.

If there is a significant possibility of this happening, must Government step in to prevent it? If information needs are basic, then should the Government pay for satisfying them? How should a basic right to information be extended, and to whom?

Issue #2: Should the Government share its legislative information system developed by the Congressional Research Service?

What is needed is information for both citizens and policymakers to use at the critical early stage of the policy-formulation process. Citizens need information as they discuss options and form opinions before policies are made. Only in this manner can they be included in the decisionmaking process of their elected representatives. Unfortunately, the Government does not pay enough attention to making relevant information known prior to policy formation.

Policymakers themselves also have a critical need for information during this stage. They need to know the facts and they need to know the interrelationships that affect subjects under consideration.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCORPIO AND THE PREPARATION OF ISSUE BRIEFS

Libraries that serve our elected representatives on the national and State levels have worked to fill this need for many decades. In the past several years, however, new capabilities made possible by automation and advanced information retrieval techniques have fostered the development of important new services to meet these needs.

For years a legislator has been able to obtain the legislative history of a bill. Now, computerized systems for tracking legislation have been developed that accomplish a more sophisticated version of this task.

In the past several years the Congressional Research Service (CRS) at the Library of Congress has developed SCORPIO, an automated bibliographic retrieval system. Recently (CRS) has begun regular preparation of Issue Briefs, which attempts to analyze the impact of various factors that will affect forthcoming legislation.

The development of SCORPIO was based on years of information retrieval research. It was also built on years of experience at the Library of Congress in meeting the information needs of legislators and in computer manipulation of bibliographic information.

As was noted above, many States have become active in the past several years in applying automation to solve some of the information needs of their legislators.

One consequence of this has been a call to bring the systems developed for the U.S. Congress, and especially SCORPIO, to the States. This raises a number of important questions about Federal development and dissemination of information technology:

1. Why should States have to spend money to develop a local capability that has been already developed?

2. Will having to share the results of subject and policy specialists' analysis of issues with users outside the Congress restrict the vital intellectual freedom needed for CRS analysts to assess issues effectively?

3. Is sharing the technology but not the value of the information created by CRS an adequate compromise?

4. Should we protect the value of an existing investment by identifying a way to enable the States to invest—perhaps jointly—in the creation of a database of their own?

Issue #3: What new services can libraries offer?

BACKGROUND

The business of communicating ideas is very much a two-way street. For a library to be a success and to serve a useful function, it must package its information in a format helpful to the library user. This means that libraries must continually listen to their audience and seek even more effective ways to make important information available.

THE NEED FOR FEEDBACK

It is enlightening to examine the process of how libraries deliver information to citizens and representatives. There is too little feedback between citizens and their information sources. That is, the information provider has no idea how his product is being used or whether people are being informed or confused.

In certain arenas there are strong feedback loops, such as between Congressmen and interest groups or between Federal research services and their users.

Libraries might move to respond more directly to the information problems of the average American. They might somehow help to promote interaction among citizens, among lawmakers and between citizens and their representatives. Or perhaps, they might simply underline the libraries' importance in enabling all parties to be well enough informed to communicate in the existing channels.

Do libraries have any role in creating a more effective link among citizens, their representatives and Government? What do they do now? What could they do?

What do libraries currently contribute to the governing process? They are public places where citizens can find resources on issues of concern before attending a meeting or testifying at a hearing. They also serve to notify the public of dates and locations of public meetings and hearings. Finally, they are a living reference source, providing access to experts in a given issue area.

WHAT NEW SERVICES COULD LIBRARIES OFFER TO INCREASE THEIR CONTRIBUTION?

In the future, libraries will provide a variety of new services. In doing so, they can offer significantly increased assistance to citizens and their elected representatives, but this will require changes in what we perceive libraries to be.

Consider the following possible new roles and their implications:

BROADCAST LIBRARIES

1. Developments in cable television will allow libraries to intermediate among individuals at remote locations. Accomplishing this will require developing a new infrastructure. In general, libraries lack staff knowledgeable in broadcasting. In many cases libraries have cultivated relationships with local media, whose cooperation might present an alternative to developing expertise and buying expensive equipment. Do we want to bring broadcast technology to libraries and librarians?

PERSONAL CLEARING-HOUSE

2. Libraries could bring together people with related interests. By taking on a more personal function than they now do, libraries could link individuals concerned with various public policy issues. They would serve as a conduit or switching mechanism for information among individuals. Would such tasks overburden libraries or compromise their neutrality as they become involved with specific interests? Do librarians have the proper interpersonal skills for such a task?

INFORMATIVE PROGRAMS

3. Libraries could help foster debate. They could expand programs that give citizens knowledge in important and controversial subjects. This would lead to a more articulate public and increased participation in the democratic process.

THE LIBRARY AS PUBLISHER

4. Libraries could become information packagers, assembling printed material, visual media, and electronic data by category on subjects of importance. Librarians would have to be nonpartisan in this task.

ANALYZING AND INTERPRETING INFORMATION

5. The library could help to prevent citizens from being hoodwinked by unscrupulous or biased sources of information. Programs and resources could be developed to allow people to verify other sources of information.

Similarly, citizens' groups would be better able to evalute information on complex subjects by turning to an impartial library resource. Such a service could be staffed by librarians or outside experts available to the library.

This might lead to a more visible role for the librarian. Yet if he or she were relied on as one who helped society evaluate difficult material in many important fields, the librarian might one day find himself embroiled in controversy. What would his legal status be? Could librarians be subpoenaed to testify. For example, could they be sued, would they be regarded as dangerous or too powerful by information sources and elected officials? Would this seriously damage the neutrality of the library?

Libraries might become politicized. Special interest groups might try to influence or lobby the library on important issues. More than ever before, it would be important to ensure that a library collection was neutral. Libraries could feel pressure to give equal shelf space--in the same way that media must give equal time. In this setting, sources of information would become more specific, more personal, and more critical for the library to have--a situation that would reduce the library's freedom of operation.

Would these new roles conflict with existing private sector institutions? Is the library qualified to interpret and analyze issues, or is this too sensitive a task to require of a public institution?

THE TIMELY LIBRARY

6. Libraries could take a more active role in getting time-sensitive information to users. The possession of information as to when a hearing will be held or when a Government agency will meet to discuss an important issue can be crucial. It may make the difference in a citizen's ability to express his views in a timely manner. Libraries could provide this information to individuals who are not well connected to the political process.

INFORMATION SPECIALIST

7. Libraries could serve as information specialists for publicly funded agencies, providing timely information or information about non-Government organizations in related fields.

EXPANDED MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES

8. The role of municipal reference libraries could be expanded to resemble a local version of the Congressional Research Service. The library would work in concert with public officials in a

client-like relationship. This would put a powerful information resource at the hands of local and State governments.

WHAT STEPS ARE NEEDED FOR LIBRARIES TO PERFORM NEW ROLES?

An important theme in this discussion guide has been that new forms of information products and services, along with changing information needs, have made libraries only one of an increasing number of suppliers of information relevant to governing society. Libraries are not the dominant influence in society they once were. And they are placing most of their bets on soon-to-be-obsolete technology. Libraries may never regain the societal role they once had, but finding new roles will be an important means for their survival.

WHO IS THE LIBRARY AUDIENCE?

The future of libraries can only be found through experimentation. This discussion has listed several possible new services. What is important is not so much the list of particulars but rather a recognition of the need to identify and create new library services. Two major questions libraries will have to ask is: Who is their audience? Whom should they serve?

Should libraries be all things to all people? Or in times of tightening resources, should they serve only those citizens who make their needs known, who are aware of and are seeking to gain specific information? This question is basic to planning for new library services. Libraries often build collections and offer programs aimed at all, both user and nonuser.

SETTING PRIORITIES

Today, libraries are caught in the service philosophy; they believe they are the only source of information for the general population. They purchase works for an incredibly broad audience but are later criticized by funding agencies for being spread too thinly and not having strong specific collections. Another round of budget cuts only exacerbates this situation.

The question of new roles becomes a question of priorities and the setting of priorities by action or by default. What will the consequences be if libraries continue today's approach of trying to provide all the services they currently offer? Who will suffer? Who can take up the slack if libraries cut back and serve only those who act on their information needs with specific requests?

Issue #4: What are the issues in freedom of information?

The rights of individuals, business organizations, and the orderly processes of Government are the foremost matters of concern when considering the problems of restricted vs. free access to information.

There are four areas of Government information handling that can lead to conflict. They are:

1. The reuse of information collected for a single special purpose, as when a corporation submits confidential data to the Securities and Exchange Commission. If the Government later releases that information, it may benefit the competition.

2. The problems associated with the collection of information on individual citizens and the assembly of centralized dossiers on individuals.

3. The question of who "owns" Government information: citizens, private contractors, or individual author/researchers.

4. The Government's need to protect its information: the issues of National Security Classification documents and the rights of Government officials to conduct business in private.

The first three questions concern problems that arise when Government acts as a repository of information about non-Government institutions. Thus, we shall consider this as one subissue. The rights of Government to protect its internal operations will comprise another subissue.

REUSING INFORMATION COLLECTED FOR A SINGLE PURPOSE

Controversy arises when attempts are made to reuse information that was originally obtained with a single and specific purpose in mind. Data collected for Equal Employment Opportunity compliance, for example, can furnish competitors with valuable information on product development plans and other proprietary matters that would otherwise be obtainable only through illegal industrial espionage. Concern with this problem has led firms that collect personal information, such as insurance companies, to set restrictive policies on the circumstances under which they will release information to outside interests.

While the Freedom of Information Act was intended to assist citizens in obtaining disclosure of reports from Government, it has now become an important new weapon of corporate lawyers. In addition to providing competitive information, antagonists in corporate lawsuits frequently obtain information about the opposing side by requesting the Government to reveal whatever information it has on a company. It is contended that this is information which is willingly submitted for one purpose but is unwillingly supplied to competing interests merely because the Freedom of Information Act has been interpreted too broadly.

GOVERNMENT DOSSIERS ON INDIVIDUALS

The potential for Government abuse of information about individual citizens has become a serious concern since the emergence of efficient data-processing equipment. It used to be economically unfeasible to collect dossiers on many Americans. While many agencies kept fragments of information, it was an expensive proposition to pull all this information together and create a complete file. Now Government and private organizations keep a great deal of information on-line, and it is used for many purposes.

The Freedom of Information Act has been useful in allowing citizens to check the accuracy of information about themselves and to expose the scope of domestic intelligence operations. With an increasing public awareness of the value of information, and the many ways it can be used and manipulated, has come an increase of Freedom of Information requests.

WHO OWNS GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

The Government acquires and processes vast amounts of information. As the Government's role of information processor increases, we must ask who retains the rights to the distribution of various types of information.

Some Government-owned information is work prepared by Government employees as part of their official duties. This material is owned by the Government; it cannot, for example, be copyrighted. Other work is prepared with Federal funds but not by Federal employees. It may be a byproduct of a Government contract, or it may be the direct result of a contract.

Finally, wholly proprietary material may be contained in a submission to the Government, to which the private owner has sole rights. This is true of much technical information acquired by the Government that has been developed with a combination of public and private funds and is subject to limited further use or disclosure. The same is the case with submissions to the Government reporting on compliance with Federal laws.

To what extent is society served by liberal Freedom of Information statutes? When should information providers be able to limit the Government's ability to reuse information?

Should the Government move to discourage the use of the Freedom of Information Act as a corporate legal weapon, or is this just another useful tool in a market economy?

Are current Freedom of Information statutes enough? Should we move to limit the ability of the Government to store information on citizens?

THE GOVERNMENT'S NEED TO PROTECT ITS OWN INFORMATION

The Government has an undisputed right to protect from disclosure information that relates to national security. However, there are many instances when Federal agencies use the national security umbrella as a basis for failing to release information that would cause no harm. NTIS would contain significantly more material if agencies actually released all nonclassified reports. The courts have acknowledged that the Government frequently withholds information needlessly. There have been a number of recent cases in which judges have refused to convict individuals who have leaked material that should not have been classified in the first place.

The recent interest in "sunshine" laws and initiatives that require public officals to reveal their daily work indicates the public's desire to more closely observe the conduct of Government. This allows more public participation in debate and helps identify which issues are subject to the greatest lobbying pressure.

Realistically though, the Government has a particular interest in being able to conduct its business in private. The deliberative process is dependent on creative debate, the discussion of unpopular options, and the ability to propose trial balloons that never leave the conference room. All these activites require privacy. Local

governments have already shown a knack for circumventing "sunshine laws" which require open hearings by refusing to classify their deliberations as "hearings."

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been focused on national security, freedom of information, and "sunshine laws." Has this effort been sufficient to ensure against information abuse, or are the issues of free access to information still unsolved and an important part of any future national information policy?

Issue #5: How do we ensure the preservation of information sources necessary for governing society?

BACKGROUND

It would be ironic if, in our zeal to plan for a wide range of new information services, we failed to ensure the survival of documents and information already in our national libraries. Preservation represents a massive and largely unmet problem for information services in the United States.

There are three policy areas that relate to the preservation of library materials: the decay of aging documents, the orientation of libraries to collections rather than to services, and the creation of mechanisms, such as a National Periodicals Center, to deal with problems of preservation.

SAVING OUR PRINTED HERITAGE

Many of the important physical records of our history, from local newspapers and documents to books more than several generations old, are gradually decaying. Those who have used material from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries already know what it is like for books to be unusable because the pages disintegrate when they are touched. Whole collections of related information can be rendered useless at the same time, for decay seldom affects only single aging volumes.

As their collections age, the libraries will spend more money to ensure survival of these materials. Thus, more and more will be spent on the preservation of only a limited spectrum of information, at the expense of broader library use.

Still worse, many of today's library managers believe loss of large parts of their collections from decay to be a far-off prospect. After all, the libraries face a number of immediate operating problems. Yet the technical hurdles solving many preservation problems are not formidable if they are caught early. Each year it becomes easier and less expensive to reproduce documents from microforms.

COLLECTION-BUILDING: A LEGACY AND A DANGER

Today librarians have a responsibility to acquire materials that may be of critical importance to present or future library users. They adopt a strategy of collecting materials that they cannot be certain of obtaining from other sources, and in so doing, address a narrower range of research questions than they would address if left free to concentrate more on user needs. This represents one

of our greatest problems in enabling libraries to concentrate on citizen needs.

As collections grow, the need to administer them also grows. Cataloging, loaning, weeding, and preserving are all required. There are fewer dollars and staff left to serve the users for whom the collections were built. Cooperative schemes in which libraries plan to borrow little-used material from each other--rather than each acquire all the items--are only a partial solution. As fewer libraries buy the books, publishers raise prices to counteract the reduced demand. The dent made on library budgets may be nearly as great.

If this is allowed to continue for too long, libraries merely become places where books are cared for. Users look elsewhere to find a place where their information needs are central. This is in danger of happening to libraries. Fifty years ago, administering the books made sense as the central focus because books were individually so expensive that they represented a significant portion of a worker's weekly wages. It makes less sense today. Now books are easy for the population to obtain from other sources, but libraries are one of the few resources for helping citizens locate and manipulate information.

This country has book collections in public, academic, and research libraries that are priceless resources for policy studies, scholarship, and research. We must identify ways to adequately preserve and support them so that they are widely accessible to users.

At the same time we must identify ways to enable many of the rest of our Nation's libraries to be free to focus more on peoples' information needs. What issues must we face if libraries are to be allowed to focus more attention on the interface of their collection and users' needs?

THE NATIONAL PERIODICALS CENTER: A RESPONSE TO THE PRESERVATION CHALLENGE

Local libraries across the Nation must spend large sums in maintaining and preserving their periodical collections. It can be argued that this is a wasteful use of library resources since monies are being used for redundant collection and preservation programs and not for new services or expanded collections. The proposed National Periodicals Center (NPC) would not only ensure that almost every issue of at least 500,000 periodicals would be

preserved for posterity, but it would provide a single source for the retrieval and demand copying of requested articles. This would free individual libraries to respond to more of their users' needs.

On the other hand, NPC would be several years in the making. One composed of a paper-based collection would be technologically obsolete before it was built. And libraries cannot create a long-term solution to the collection and preservation problem independently of other organizations in the private sector that have the legal right to distribute the information.

If there were one centralized NPC for all 50,000 titles, publishers and suppliers of article reprints would stand to lose their heretofore profitable business of providing back copies of materials that libraries do not have. It is unlikely that publishers would consent to NPC distribution of material on which they held copyrights without full library payment of copyright fees. With payment of such fees, use of an NPC would be virtually as costly as use of the decentralized interlibrary loan system that exists today.

The library community has always felt safest in having more than one repository for vital information. And lately libraries have developed automated cooperative techniques. These mechanisms--such as OCLC and its interlibrary loan system--lay the foundation for libraries to share the responsibility for preservation and to electronically send their requests back and forth.

Finally, the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) recently commissioned a study of alternative ways to create an NPC. It then expressed its desire to develop an NPC that had elements of each sector in order to take advantage of the unique capabilities of each. Such a system would use the capabilities of:

-- libraries to use bibliographic data to identify needed information,

-- the private sector to supply some back periodical needs from its existing collections, and

-- the Government to subsidize an electronic communication network and a smaller backup collection.

What are the key issues to be considered before establishing a National Periodicals Center or any solution to the preservation problem?

Does the Federal Government's interest in preservation necessarily imply a Government- supported, centralized, physical collection? Can the Government implement its objectives by stimulating the further development and coordination of existing resources?

Can libraries afford to proceed as if the interests of libraries and publishers were in conflict, or can we create a public/private sector interface along which problem-solving can take place?

Issue #6: Do we need a national information policy?

Only in the past few years have we begun to realize just how much our economy is dependent on information. As we begin to appreciate the scope and complexity of information-related issues, industry leaders have begun to call for a coherent national information policy.

It is argued that just as we need a well-reasoned national energy policy if we are to make intelligent choices about energy resources, we must articulate a national information policy if we are to avoid bedlam in managing our information resources.

Let us remember that the information industry is dominated by many voices with a multitude of needs and desires; forging a national information policy may prove no easier than our present experience with energy policy has been.

The preceding five issue discussions touch on some of the important information-related problems facing the United States. Any national policy would also have to include the following:

COPYRIGHT

1. Copyright of printed materials must also include computer software. We must create an environment that encourages the creation of new material yet protects the author's rights, regardless of the distribution technology.

REGULATING THE INFORMATION ECONOMY

2. How are we to regulate new information services? Our economy includes free markets and highly regulated utilities. What models should be applied to information? How do we assess its value and ensure diversity? How do we keep costs low enough to include all citizens and avoid information-rich vs. information-poor Americans? Should we let demand determine what is produced, or should the Government take a more active role? Who should decide?

THE PAPERWORK CRISIS

3. The Government imposes an incredible paperwork burden on private organizations in its effort to enforce the law. How can we reap the best from Government regulation without costing the private sector billions of dollars?

CONTENT OF THE MEDIA

4. For what purposes and to what degree should the content of television and movies be controlled?

REWRITING THE COMMUNICATIONS ACT

5. How are rights and privileges to be redistributed among industry participants--in an industry where the computer and the communications businesses are beginning to compete directly with each other.

THE WORLD ADMINISTRATIVE RADIO CONFERENCE (WARC)

6. What positions should the United States take with regard to the international distribution of radio frequencies and allocation of geographical positions for satellites?

THE FEDERAL INFORMATION POLICY ARENA

The United States has hardly been idle in writing specific information-related legislation. Congress is concerned with rewriting the Communications Act; it recently updated the copyright laws; and, of course, it established NCLIS. Among Executive agencies, the Federal Communications Commission has been a powerful force in administering information policy decades before that term ever became fashionable.

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration is responsible for defining important issues for the Administration to consider. And today, the Administration itself is considering components of a multifaceted information policy.

Thus, the Administration, the Congress, citizens, Federal agencies, and the library profession are all engaged in seeking to understand and recommend action. Yet taken together, these actions are still separate, fragmented, and piecemeal deliberations on a subject that touches the national interest in critical ways.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The White House Conference on Library and Information Services is bringing together citizens to consider for the first time a much broader menu of information-related issues than citizens--or any other nonprofessional group--have considered before. The information profession, interested citizens, and Government in all areas of work have great hopes for the clarity of thrust toward focusing on and accomplishing objectives the Conference can provide.

While the White House Conference will be one of the largest American forums to consider information policy, we are not alone in the world. Several

European countries are now undertaking studies to determine a national position on many of these issues. The equivalent of two Government departments in the European Economic Commmunity are concerned with developing technology, services, and the infrastructure required to ensure a sound international position. The Europeans include under the rubric of information policy everything from the electronic transmission of documents to protection of computer industry.

NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICY: A CHALLENGE

Should a mechanism be established for continuing discussion of an information policy at the national level? What form should it take? If it should be institutionalized, should it be an agency? If it should be less highly structured, who should call it together?

Who should the actors be? How can we assure that such key contributors as citizens, experts, and lawmakers have an effective ongoing voice?

Consider the following possible specifications for a national information policy entity:

1. As a starting point, it would have to embrace the incredible rate of technological development. Information science is a flexible art--it must be able to evolve with new technology and new needs.

2. It would have to make a fundamental effort to allow for innovation and to encourage entrepreneurs. Today, for example, libraries benefit from having a wide range of automation options available to meet a variety of priorities and needs. In the telecommunications field the Carterfone Decision, which allowed attachment of any equipment to the telephone system that would not degrade the network, allowed development and use of equipment within a wide range of capabilities--such as use of home answering machines and use of home terminals. There is nothing like this flexibility in Europe.

   The policy tool must be able to grow with the industry; it must be able to accommodate needs we have not yet even dreamed of.

3. It would have to foster a continuing public/private dialog. It would seek to provide stability in the industry without excess regulation.

4. Finally, it needs to reflect a decision to protect not so much the institutions that perform critical information functions but rather the functions themselves. Such roles as creating, sharing, interpreting, storing, disseminating, and reissuing the product of our thought are now performed by publishers and libraries. Yet changes in the ways information is delivered in the next two decades will be severe. We must keep libraries--and the broader system in which they operate--in the forefront of our thinking. They must survive in a manner that will ensure their ability to provide maximum information services to all Americans. The information functions themselves must be understood and saved if we are to preserve our ability to continue to generate cultural, technological, intellectual, and spiritual resources.